

## MAINTAINING A PRODUCTIVE WORK FORCE

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An employer often does an excellent job of hiring and breaking-in a worker and then lets him drift into unhappiness and low productivity. The high cost of labor makes maximum productivity even more important in today's business climate.

Although volumes about employee motivation deal with methods of realizing each worker's highest potential, three fundamental ingredients are apparent. Each employee must have answers to three basic questions.

What am I supposed to do?

How well am I supposed to do?

How well am I doing?

### What Am I Supposed to Do?

In good personnel management, each employee is provided a clear description of the assigned job. A written outline of the worker's duties and responsibilities is usually desirable, but this can be — and often is — overdone. A well-written job description reflects major assigned tasks, clearly defines delegated responsibility and authority and explains the supervisory chain.

Asking an employee, "What do you do on your job?" and hearing the reply, "Whatever I am told by the bosses," is not uncommon in the agribusiness community. Hoping for much initiative from a worker under such conditions, however, is rather unrealistic.

### How Well Am I Supposed to Do?

Quantity and quality of work expected is known as the standard of performance. The level of accuracy or proficiency that is acceptable in the job performance must be made clear to each worker. Standards become much more meaningful and realistic when established jointly by the supervisor and the worker.

Employee performance cannot be evaluated accurately unless a measuring rod exists on which to compare actual performance. Thus, the standard of performance becomes a critical control device in the management process.

Employees who have doubts as to how well they are expected to perform their various job duties do not feel comfortable in their work and are consequently not as productive as possible.

### How Well Am I Doing?

Because many employees really never know how well they are doing on their job, they make little or no effort toward improvement. Such workers have a feeling of insecurity, and productivity suffers.

Successful supervisors appraise an employee's work performance on a continuous basis, making corrections and expressing compliments as specific situations occur. Also, they periodically conduct a performance appraisal interview with each worker. The most popular interval for such interviews is at the end of the first 6 months of service and annually thereafter. Best results are obtained when the interview is made a dignified occasion; it should have the aura of an important event. It is.

Consider the following points in preparing for and conducting the performance appraisal interview.

- Do homework and be ready. Keeping an employee record card is a very convenient tool. It allows you to jot down specifics (good and bad) on a worker's performance as they occur during the year. This data is needed to make the performance interview meaningful. Employees do not like generalities; they like to hear specifics.

- Allow plenty of time for the interview. Arrange the schedule so that the interview will not be rushed. Make the appointment with the worker a sufficient time in advance, and let him know the purpose of the interview. Employees do not like short-notice appointments on such a vital subject, nor do they like to be kept guessing about the purpose of an interview with their supervisor.

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- Permit no disturbances during the session. Disturbances cause the train of thought to be lost and detract from the dignity of the occasion.

- Begin the interview by pointing out strengths. Be very specific. A positive tone at the start prevents the employee from building mental defensive barriers which are hard to tear down later in the interview.

- Let the employee talk. Be a good listener. Do not interrupt, and don't argue. Control your temper regardless of how the interview turns.

- Offer suggested solutions to personal problems sparingly. Be able to suggest capable counselors for specific personal problems. Few supervisors are capable of in-depth interviewing on personal problems.

- Point out areas of work where the employee can strengthen his performance. Be very specific.

Generalities here will not suffice; they do far more damage than good. Be constructive, and outline a possible approach for the employee to follow in improving. Offer to help the employee overcome weak points in his performance.

- Let the employee say how he would like to be supervised. Each worker is different, and each requires different handling. This can be a most fruitful discussion if properly conducted.

- Ask the employee for ideas on how the organization can be improved. If an idea from the discussion is adopted, be quick to give credit to the employee who suggested it. He may have another idea later.

- Terminate the interview on a note of friendliness, enthusiasm and challenge. This is your chance to manifest your best leadership traits.

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